

Northumbland's for many years, and it stands well, and is now used in the shape of columns for lamps, of which I have sent 300 and upwards, and continue making them, and it is also used for slabs, chimney-pieces, tables, vases, and many other purposes. "H. G. M.'s" statement, if not corrected, will tend to injure the trade, seeing it in a first-rate practical work, and also to discourage native industry. Foreign artists are too often encouraged without merit, and I think, Mr. Editor, your journal will cultivate native talent, especially as the art of scagliola is brought to such perfection by English artists. I will, if you think proper, lodge some specimens of scagliola at the Office of The Builder, and I, as well as the trade in general, will feel glad to see this inserted in your valuable journal.

Hoddesdon.

JAMES PULHAM.

I shall return to the subject of plastic compositions, cements, artificial stone, &c., in a future number.

#### ROYAL INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.

An ordinary meeting of the Institute was held on Monday, January 25th, Mr. H. E. Kendall, vice president, in the chair, when Herr Ludwig Gruner, of Rome, and Il Conte Cavaliere Orti di Manara, Podestà di Verona, were elected corresponding members; Mr. John Tarring, fellow; and Messrs. F. Clark, Novins Compton, Frederick Lett, Samuel Peyton, Robert C. Saunders, and Thomas Fuller, associates. Among the donations announced was "Views of Ancient Monuments in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan," by F. Catherwood, presented by the author, for which Mr. Godwin moved a special vote of thanks, and took occasion to speak of the interesting nature of the work.

A paper was then read "On the Domestic Architecture of France during the Middle Ages," by Mr. Ambrose Poynter, wherein the gradual changes which occurred between the 13th and 17th centuries, were traced. The data were chiefly taken from Rouen, where he did not find any specimen earlier than the first-named date. Beauvais contains some stone houses of the same date. The roofs at this time were equilateral, but had afterwards much greater elevation. The dormer windows became an important feature, and were in some examples highly decorated. In the 14th century he found few stone houses in France, and in the 15th they were chiefly of timber with overhanging fronts, one story projecting over the other. Bricks then became used in connection with timber. Protection being an object, there were few windows in the ground-story. In the 15th century the stairs were often surmounted in a *tourelle* projecting from the angle of the house, especially when at the corner of a street. At Dijon there was an interesting example of this, where the top of the newell was sculptured to represent a man with downers on his head, which branched out and formed the roof. At Paris these *tourelles* are numerous; they are to be found also in Scotch architecture. Passing on to the time of the *Renaissance*, he showed the change in style which took place, and alluded to some fine specimens now at the Palace of the Beaux Arts, in Paris. The paper then gave a view of the improvements made in the internal arrangement of houses in France, and some notices of the state of the city in early times. Philip Augustus paved for the first time four of the principal streets. In the 14th century the state of the streets was dreadful, nor did they become much better for a hundred years after. Mr. Poynter took an opportunity to mention that the French government had presented, through M. Guizot, to our School of Design, casts from the celebrated bronze doors of the Baptistery at Florence, executed by Ghiberti, after the designs of Arnolfo; and Mr. Wilson, the director of the school of design, who was present, invited all members of the Institute to examine them.

Mr. Poynter, relative to Mr. Poynter's paper, considered that the roofs of high pitch were earlier than agricultural roofs. He mentioned that the works of the transition period in France, were much better than the Elizabethan works of this country, and attributed it to the circumstance that France had a more intimate connection with Italy than we had.

The council have not yet reported on the prize essays.

#### A FEW WORDS ON COMPETITIONS.

ALTHOUGH the subject of architectural competitions has been discussed, we still seem to stand a long way distant from improvement. The general ignorance of the public in any thing beyond the mere hawk-illustration part of architecture, the apathy of the influential members of the profession towards the immediate interests of their younger brethren, and the want of energetic remonstrance and vigorous co-operation amongst architects in general, are obstacles in the way of change which need to be at once stoutly assailed and demolished. We assume that, were competition only a little better managed, it might powerfully aid the progress of art, that it might call out the latent energies of the young, and infuse something of the ardour of youth into the exertions of the more advanced, keep the public mind alive to the use and value of architecture, and open to all a legitimate road to success in an art in which the avenues to fame and recompense are confessedly few, and difficult of discernment. We deem that the attempt to prove that all competition is adverse to progress in art fails, and is entirely inconsistent with experience in buildings erected or in progress; the errors that have resulted were clear and remediable, and could not recur with the changes about which there is no difference of opinion amongst us. Each era, for example, explicit instructions, public exhibition before the decision, and competent judgment. The barrier drawn between architects and the notice of the public needs every examination, and speedy removal; but under the influence of a better system in competitions we are confident that the profession would rise in the estimation of the world, which is at present positively ignorant of its distinctive existence; that the appliances of this art would be extended to buildings to which it has been supposed inimical rather than subservient; that the accredited professor would supply the place of the empiric; and finally, that architects, instead of consuming those days when hope and exertion are at the highest in working out the ideas of others on an inadequate stipend, or in filling the duties of some appointment in which art has no place, would find the pleasing and healthful reward for years of toil and outlay, in the practice of an art which speaks the history of mankind, and yields to all its votaries the "purest well" of intellectual delight.

We can hardly call to mind an instance in which competition has been conducted with fairness towards the several competitors, or for the benefit of the public. Indeed, it can hardly fail to be otherwise in the present state of matters. The interest which architecture excites is so small compared with its importance, that its finest works are allowed to be destroyed without the slightest notice. So that the usual education and habits of men are calculated to fit them even less for judges of architecture than for architects, and other considerations are allowed to operate with undue influence.

It seems strange that in a free country, we should permit ourselves to be ruled in matters of taste, possessing an importance in the highest degree national, by those who have never devoted a single day of their lives to the study of the subjects on which they sit in judgment. Were our own character as a nation not involved in the question, it would still be unjust to suffer the dishonest proceedings complained of by architects; and were they the only parties interested, which they are not, their claims should be considered in a country where justice has been always considered the brightest jewel in the sceptre of a government. We hesitate not to say, that were an individual to act as, with few exceptions, committees have acted, his society would be shunned by all who rank themselves as men of honour and integrity. We need not deny that in some cases committees have desired to act with perfect good faith, but in general their ignorance of every thing that to form competent critics they should know, presents an insuperable barrier to a correct decision. Composed, for the most part, of men who consider the education of an architect limited to the knowledge of the five orders, they decide upon matters affecting the prosperity of twenty, fifty, or a hundred rising artists, and the progress or decline of art. One who applied in a case of typhus fever to a baker, or in an abstract point of law to a wine-

merchant, would be considered as a fit subject for a commission of lunacy; yet we could mention cases in which the pursuits of adjudicators have been so little akin to the subjects on which they have sat to decide.

On one occasion a committee, for the erection of a pump-room at Harrogate, was composed of seventeen individuals, among whom were firemen, two wine-merchants, a porter-dealer, a baker, a coach-builder, a druggist, a plumber, a milkmaid, and a grocer. Now we wish to set no limits to the investigations of man in architecture, or in any other study, but are these the individuals in whose custody we should choose, from their previous study and research, to leave the arts of a country? Doubtless they were all honourable men, but some of them, if not all, were deceived by the trickeries so commonly employed, and which could not one moment escape the notice of an architect. Probably few of them were accustomed to the examination of geometrical drawings, the understanding of which requires long previous study and attention. Each one, we think, on being shown the elevation of a building, would at once form an opinion as to its effect, instead of placing the plan and elevation side by side, and judging from the two, the only way in which architectural drawings are intended to be examined, as through the medium of several the same effect is conveyed which otherwise would be expressed by one perspective view. An inspection of the plan might show that certain parts receded or advanced from the front; these in the elevation would appear upon the same plane, so that a tower shown above the roof, and as if it were upon the plane of the front, might, in reality, stand in the centre of the block, and not appear when erected except from a point far removed from the building. If it requires great experience in the architect to unravel the mysteries of plan and section—and if, in addition, he must possess a knowledge of the strength of timber, of requisite supports and counterforts, of sizes of openings necessary to admit a proper quantity of light—if, in the experience of the practical man, he must add the requirements of the man of science, and the taste and fancy of the artist, he has surely a right to expect corresponding qualifications and careful attention from those who adjudicate. Ordinarily, the committee are compelled to throw aside the instructions which were rigidly to be observed, so that the competitor who has acted with most good faith, in endeavouring to make his design correspond in all particulars, is the first to feel the effects of his mistaken confidence. The committee will often state that the building must be of a style to which they attach an unintelligible name; that it shall be built of certain materials; and shall afford accommodation sufficient to double the sum the architect has to work upon; and that the drawings shall be delivered on a day so near at hand, that he has barely time to execute the actual drawing, much less to mature the design. How many instances have there been in which the whole of the competition drawings have been laid aside, the work being given to some more fortunate architect, who has had a larger sum for expenditure, and the whole of the competition drawings at his disposal for reference, no remuneration whatever being granted to the competitors. How often after the drawings have been submitted, has one of the competitors received instructions to prepare another design, more in accordance with the altered views of the committee, to which the premium has been awarded. The architects who at present compete are, for the most part, those to whom competition presents the only chance of success; they are compelled to embark in it with all its evils, and though, through trickery and ignorance, their chance is small, it is their only one. But we cannot notice all the disadvantages of the present system, and the dishonesty and want of principle which it engenders—one of its effects we witness in some of our national edifices; and it is not too much to say, that were a change effected, competition might often be appealed to, and we might hope to feel the result in a higher character in all our structures. The only course which, in the opinion of the writer, committees can pursue to induce men of established reputation to compete, with perfect fairness to the competitors, and to prevent the annoying attacks to which they are now exposed, will